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INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 1612
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 5481
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 5820
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 3526
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 5844
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY 0881
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT PRIORITY 9602
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 2052
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 1412
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TAGS: PREL PTER QA MR KWBG IR IS

SUBJECT: MFA COMMENTS ON UNFREEZING RELATIONS WITH QATAR AND MAURITANIA

Classified By: DCM Luis G. Moreno, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (C) MFA Deputy Director General for the Middle East (NEA A/S-equivalent) Yacov Hadas briefed PolCouns February 12 on Israel's efforts to normalize relations with Qatar and Mauritania which were frozen during the Gaza operation. Regarding Qatar, Hadas said the Qataris had offered Israel to reopen the Israeli trade office, but have it staffed by local employees, with Israeli diplomats visiting once a month. Hadas said Israel had earlier informed the Qataris that Israel would not continue to do business as usual despite the freeze. Hadas said Israel would not rush into rejecting the Qatari offer regarding the trade office, even though they regard it as unacceptable. Instead, they will wait for the pressure to build on Sheikh Hamad. (Note: Hadas asserted that the Qatari offer had been coordinated with the U.S. and said Washington should understand that Israel seeks the full restoration of its small but important diplomatic presence in Doha.)

¶2. (C) Hadas commented that while he was aware that some parts of the Israeli Government now regard Qatar as having made a strategic shift and joined the Iranian-led radical axis out of ideological commitment, he and Foreign Minister Livni did not share this view. Despite Qatari actions -- including Al-Jazeera's pro-Hamas propaganda, the freezing of relations, the hosting of the Doha meeting during the Gaza operation, and Qatari efforts to undermine Egypt by planning to host a parallel Gaza reconstruction conference -- the MFA believes Sheikh Hamad is essentially an opportunist who is now having second thoughts. Hadas said not everyone in Israel regards Qatar as a lost cause, adding that Livni continues to appreciate the Qatari invitation for her to visit Doha last year at a time when other Arab moderates would not do anything concrete to bolster her politically.

¶3. (S) Regarding Mauritania, Hadas said the Israeli Embassy in Washington was going to discuss the situation with the AF bureau, including the possibility of looking for ways to send Nouakchott the message that breaking relations with Israel would only increase Mauritania's post-coup isolation. He said the Israelis had information (Note: possibly from the Moroccans) that Algeria and Libya were offering the Mauritanians money to break relations with Israel, and he requested that the U.S. use its "good relations" with Algiers and Tripoli to convince them to stop this attempt at bribery. While Hadas acknowledged that Israeli interests in Mauritania were marginal, he noted that the Mauritanian military, including junta leader General Abdel Aziz, valued their security relationship with Israel and the Israelis

thought there was potential to develop Mauritania into a more important counter-terrorism player in the Trans-Saharan region.

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